

House Communications Office
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House Honors Sen. Coverdell

Members of the General Assembly paid tribute to one of their predecessors through the passage of H.R. 47. The resolution is an effort to honor the memory of a great Georgian, the late Paul Coverdell, by naming the Legislative Office Building after him. Majority Leader Jerry Keen called it "a great honor for a great public servant."



GEORGIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SESSION REPORT

Tort Reform tackled and tamed by House

"The Civil Justice Reform Act is major step toward restoring the balance and fairness to our justice system." Gov. Sonny Perdue

Hospitals, health care providers and small businesses have been plagued with the increasing difficulty of locating liability insurance, resulting in a potential decrease in the availability and access to quality, affordable health care services for the citizens of Georgia. Senate Bill 3 addressed the abundance of frivolous medical malpractice lawsuits flooding our state's courtrooms and striking fear in the hearts of our health care facilities and small businesses. The multitude of medical malpractice lawsuits has caused physicians to suffer excessive insurance premiums, resulting in the high cost of healthcare. This in turn has not only made it difficult for the average person to afford necessary medical care, but small businesses are finding it difficult to provide healthcare coverage for their employees. House Speaker Glenn Richardson felt that the issue was of such great importance and complex nature that he put together a special committee on Civil Justice Reform.

The passage of Senate Bill 3 marked a triumphant victory for what State Legislators felt was a serious imbalance in Georgia's healthcare system. Governor Sonny Perdue called the legislation "a major step toward restoring the balance and fairness to our justice system." The bill provides a solution to the present medical malpractice crisis and enables all Georgians to have quality healthcare. It also alleviates physicians from burdensome medical malpractice insurance premiums and excessive lawsuit damages.

- Story by: Jenee' Burke



Photo courtesy of Ben Gray & the A.J.C.

The Speaker's View

To my fellow Georgians,

This past session was an important moment in Georgia's history and will be recorded for future generations to look back upon and learn from.

We transitioned political power, enacted sweeping reforms to our civil justice system and our ethics laws, addressed key issues in our business community to foster economic development, and allowed key legislation long ignored to be voted on by your legislators.

All 180 Representatives did an outstanding job bringing the views of their respective communities before the House and in the end, the people of Georgia will benefit from our hard work.

It has been honor to serve my colleagues and my fellow Georgians as Speaker of the House and I look forward to continuing our work as we move forward.

Glenn Richardson
Speaker of the House



Photo courtesy of Ben Gray & the A.J.C.

Bipartisanship brings Georgia's High Schools into Virtual Reality

The Georgia Virtual High School is an internet-based online public high school, created by the state DOE, which will give students in any region of the state access to twelve AP courses and over sixty high school courses. These courses will be offered and available both during the normal school year during the summer break.

The Virtual High School will allow students to interact with a teacher via the internet, email, and telephone. Students all across the state, in every nook and cranny, will have access to the school, and can take in their home on their family's personal computer or at their school.

Any student who is twenty-one years old or younger will be eligible to enroll in the school, at no cost to the student. The eligibility standards for students will be set by the DOE, making sure that eligible public school students are given priority over any other student.

"The Georgia Virtual High School will provide every high school student throughout Georgia the opportunity to learn at their full potential and help prepare them for college," said Governor Sonny Perdue.

- Story by: Brent Cranfield

Ethics Reform passes at last

House Bill 48 was introduced as Georgia's strongest ethics bill in history, providing for substantial ethics reform. The legislation forces our public officials to take more personal responsibility for their actions.



Photo courtesy of Ben Gray & the A.J.C.

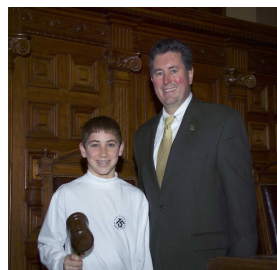
Lobbyists are now required to tell who their clients are, and how much money they receive from each of those clients. This is the first time that this issue has been addressed, and it will make the public aware of who is paying for lobbying activities. Lobbyists will now be required to disclose not only what they spend, but how they spend it according to their efforts.

This bill closes the revolving door of Members of the General Assembly and executive level state employees from leaving their governmental positions and using their influence on behalf of special interest groups in Georgia. For the first time in the history of Georgia, the heads of agencies and departments, constitutional officers, executive directors of all governmental boards and authorities, and state elected officials must wait at least one year after the expirations of their term in office before registering as a lobbyist.

This bill also strengthens the fines for violating state ethics laws, it sets limits and requirements for the reporting of campaign contributions, and it seeks the removal of political influence within the state's judicial system. Governor Sonny Perdue called this bill, "the strongest ethics reform package Georgia has ever seen."

- Story by: Jenee' Burke

A Page's Point of View



When I was asked to be a page, I had no clue what it would be like. I never really thought about it before and it was very interesting to see how the state government works on a daily basis. When I arrived at the state capitol I was not too nervous because I went with my older brother. We got to walk around the capitol and see some of the different rooms and their uses. After we walked around for a little bit we had to go to a meeting that taught us how to be a page. There were many rules and that made me nervous because I thought that I would forget something. The paging started around noon and the first couple of time I went on the floor I was a little nervous but I got the hang of it very quickly. It was fun to hear all the Representatives talking about the different bills, but after the fourth or fifth hour I started to get a little tired. Overall it was a great experience and I would recommend it to anyone who is old enough.

- Story by: Kevin Grasso (7th grader at North Forsyth Middle School) with Speaker of the House, Glenn Richardson

Georgia's War on Drugs

House limits Pseudoephedrine access

In a tremendous display of bipartisan effort, lawmakers pledged their support to the war on drugs through the passage of House Bill 216. The bill restricts access to pseudoephedrine, an ingredient very common in many over the counter cold medications.

Pseudoephedrine also happens to be one of the three primary ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine, an evil menace on the loose in Georgia's communities. The legislation is aimed at not only putting a halt to the manufacture of methamphetamine, but also heightening public awareness of its dangers. Similar laws have been adopted in other states, such as Oklahoma, and have had overwhelming success.

The use and manufacture of the drug has become a growing trend of epidemic proportions in Georgia, especially in the Northwestern region. Just this year, authorities discovered a "super lab" in the suburbs of Smyrna; the lab was the largest ever found in the state! With the drug creeping closer and closer into communities statewide, members of the General Assembly felt that it was time to take action.

"We have a problem," said Senator Jeff Mullis (R-Chickamauga). "And the problem in rural Georgia is methamphetamine. It's a plague in our community. And if you don't have it in your community, it's coming soon."

- Story by: Jenee' Burke

Women's Healthcare

Women's healthcare and safety were also at the forefront of lawmaker's agenda during the 2005 legislative session. House Bill 197, termed "Woman's Right to Know," called for changes in Georgia's abortion laws and passed the House floor with a 139-35 vote, showing strong bi-partisan support.

The bill changed Georgia law to require a woman seeking an abortion to make contact with the doctor's office either in person or by telephone at least one day before the procedure. The new law also mandates that women seeking abortions be provided with medical information fully informing them of the procedure and any complications that may accompany.

Parental consent standards were added, making it necessary for minors under the age of 18 to inform their parents or legal guardians of the forthcoming procedure before it may be carried out. Earlier laws allowed for parental "stand-ins," such as a neighbor, friend, or boyfriend over the age of 18.

- Story by: Jenee' Burke



Photo courtesy of Ben Gray & the A.J.C.

Majority View

With the 2005 legislative session now behind us, we can look back on our accomplishments and be proud of the work we did for Georgia.

A lot of behind the scenes work took place before the session began to relocate all members into new offices, assign new committee chairmen and members, and transition a new leadership team. With this work completed, we tackled some very important issues and I believe made some positive changes for the people of Georgia.

We enacted long overdue reforms to our civil justice system that will benefit our state's business community and improve access to healthcare. After year's of inaction, the Woman's Right to Know bill finally received a vote and was signed by the Governor. We reformed our ethics laws that oversee the actions of elected officials and we cleaned up the lines defining Georgia's congressional districts putting communities back together.

Over the summer, we will continue our work with study committees meeting to explore important issues like education funding and property taxes, the HOPE scholarship, and wildlife management.

All in all, the session was a success and the people of Georgia were the overall winners. I congratulate my colleagues on a job well done for Georgia.

Rep. Jerry Keen
Majority Leader

Continuity for Georgia's Congressional Maps

The Georgia General Assembly completed action on a mid-decade redistricting effort this session, sending their newly proposed Congressional boundaries to Governor Perdue. The state House passed the re-mapping legislation giving its final stamp of approval to minor changes made and passed by the Senate.

Once Governor Perdue signs off on the new map, it will travel to Washington, D.C. to either get its approval or disapproval from the federal Department of Justice. The DOJ will make the final decision on whether the new maps meet the requirements of the federal Voting Rights Act before it can take effect for the 2006 congressional elections.

The outgoing congressional district map was drafted by the legislature in 2001, following the 2000 Census as is the custom. With a new Republican leadership, the new House majority took on the task of drawing what they considered to be a more fair and consistent set of boundaries.

The intent of HB 499 and the changes to the congressional maps were to bring communities of interest together, make it more simple for voters and citizens to know who is representing their interests their interests in Washington. Congressional redistricting is mandated by the U.S. Constitution after each decennial census, although the Georgia General Assembly is free to reapportion more frequently than once every ten years, and that is what happened during this session.

Reapportionment is generally necessitated by uneven population growth and movement so that like election districts consist of equal numbers in population. The district lines determine whose congressional district office a citizen would need to call for federal government services.

The 2005 map reduces the number of split counties and precincts among different congressional districts from the 2001 version. The 2001 map saw 34 counties split among multiple congressional districts. The new 2005 version reduces that number to 18. Likewise is the case with regards to voting precincts within the state's counties, reducing the number of split precincts by more than 75%.

Along with the passage of the new map, the House and Senate also passed a new set of "Redistricting Standards & Guidelines" for future reapportionment attempts. HB 168 creates a statute of standards that the House and Senate felt were needed to guide the members of the General Assembly in determining the proper district configurations. The standards are to make sure that the legislature complies with the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 so that no district will be drawn to dilute the strength of any voting person or group of people. It also sees to it that districts are drawn in contiguous territory, that bizarre map shapes are avoided, and that communities of interest remain whole.

- Story by: Brent Cranfield



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